



Shifting digital, shifting context: (re)considering teacher professional development for online and blended learning in the COVID-19 era

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Abstract

This paper is in response to the manuscript entitled, “Improving teacher professional development for online and blended learning: A systematic meta-aggregative review” (Philipsen et al. in *Educ Technol Res Dev* 67:1145–1174, 2019) from a research perspective. The impact of this study is that it resulted in a guiding framework for teacher professional development (TPD) for online and blended learning (OBL). The basis of this study may be applied to explore the quick shift to digital teaching and learning amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. A potential limitation of the resulting framework in this study is that TPD for OBL needs may currently differ, as teachers are experiencing appreciably different learning and performance contexts related to the mandated shift in professional practice to address continuity of instruction. The application of the methodology in this study combined with quick response research approaches (Quarantelli, in: Stallings (ed) *Methods of disaster research*, Philadelphia, Xlibris, 2002) could potentially extend the Philipsen et al. (*Educ Technol Res Dev* 67:1145–1174, 2019) TPD framework to address educator preparation for successful professional practice in online and blended environments in times of crisis.

Keywords Teacher professional development · Online and blended learning · Learning and performance context

Study overview

In their study, “Improving teacher professional development for online and blended learning: A systematic meta-aggregative review,” Philipsen et al. contribute evidence-based recommendations for teacher professional development (TPD) targeting skills and knowledge related to teaching in online and blended environments (Philipsen et al. 2019). They employed a meta-aggregative review process using qualitative analysis of 15 studies of TPD for online and blended learning (OBL) programs. The outcome of their analyses

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resulted in a set of synthesized findings that were employed to create a framework to guide the preparation of teachers for effective OBL experiences.

Value of study

The global shift to digital instruction in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated nearly instantaneous provision of TPD for OBL, as most educators (and students) had little to no experience with these instructional delivery approaches. As such, the Philipsen et al. (2019) study and its resulting framework provide a potential model of inquiry to examine TPD for OBL strategies employed in a crisis context, the outcomes of which might be used to create a similar framework for the after-COVID era (Barnett 2020). In their discussion of the outcomes of this study, the authors acknowledge the importance of contextualizing the results and invite researchers to explore and possibly expand on the findings that informed their TPD framework.

Application

Emerging research has begun to feature the stories of teachers' rapid shift to digital and related efforts to prepare them to effectively design, develop, and implement OBL instruction in this time of crisis (Ferdig et al. 2020; Hartshorne et al. 2020; Reynolds and Chu 2020). The application of the meta-aggregative review process featured in the Philipsen et al. (2019) study could potentially be used to examine the early stories from educators and professional development personnel to determine if the factors identified as critical features of such experiences align with or extend those that were ascertained in the initial Philipsen et al. study.

Limitations

Philipsen et al. (2019) indicate the importance of acknowledging the existing context regarding OBL. The notion of context is a key consideration in the design of learning solutions, including TPD for OBL. Tessmer and Richey state that, "Context is then a multilevel body of factors in which learning and performance are embedded...These factors' physical, social, and instructional aspects interplay to influence learning" (1997, p. 87).

While perhaps not a limitation per se, it is notable that the studies examined in the meta-aggregate analysis (naturally) occurred prior to the global pandemic. Educators around the world are experiencing a unique and unprecedented context—one in which no choice was given with regard to the shift to digital, with a multitude of implications. As such, other influencing factors have possibly emerged with regard to educator needs related to TPD for OBL.

In addition to the visible changes in the physical and logistical implications of the sudden pivot to OBL, less evident personal factors, such as teacher emotion and motivation, have been impacted by the drastic change in professional responsibilities. Scott and Sutton describe teaching as being an emotionally-charged activity, "especially when teachers must change their practices" (2009, p. 151). Bennett (2014) concurs, indicating how changes in teaching practices, particularly in the transition to online teaching, can strongly impact

teacher emotions and motivation. The shift to OBL delivery of instruction can also create significant anxiety among students who must shift to become distance learners, which inherently impacts teacher anxiety as well (Jegade and Kirkwood 1994). Kim and Pekrun (2014) contend that emotions influence cognitive processes and strategies, decision-making, and motivation, all factors being reciprocal and connected to learning, including teacher learning related to OBL.

Presented with an entirely new manner to approach teaching and learning in the midst of a global health crisis, educators have had to operate within the lower levels of Maslow's (1962) hierarchy, striving simply to survive and carry out their responsibilities as best they can. Essentially, the transition to OBL delivery may situate many teachers as novice learners in this new environment, with a need to focus exclusively on context, curriculum, and students (Richardson 2007) in order to support their students as effectively as possible while developing proficiency in OBL approaches. Changes in teacher perspectives on their own professionalism, along with the myriad of distinctive contextual factors can influence professional development strategies and programming needed to support educators in this time of crisis.

Future suggestions

Mackey et al. (2012) employed Quarantelli's (2002) quick response research approach to capture educator experiences in a quick shift to blended learning for post-earthquake continuity of instruction efforts in New Zealand. Such an approach could be combined with the methodology employed in the Philipsen et al. (2019) study to obtain the important perspectives of teachers and professional development personnel regarding their rapid shift to digital. Addressing the unique factors related to shifting contexts could contribute toward the worthy goal of extending the Philipsen et al. TPD for OBL framework for application in the current after-COVID era.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest I have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

Human and animal rights and informed consent This work did not involve human or animal participants, and therefore, no informed consent processes were required.

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